

## AMERICA'S PURSUIT OF THE NATIONAL INTERESTS: PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

BY

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USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

**AMERICA'S PURSUIT OF THE NATIONAL INTERESTS: PAST, PRESENT AND  
FUTURE**

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

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The Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986 establishes a framework for the President of the United States to articulate the worldwide interests, objectives and goals vital to American national security as part of America's grand strategy. The most fundamental task in devising a grand strategy is to determine the national interests. Once identified, interests serve as the foundation for foreign policy and military strategy; they determine the basic direction.....the types and amounts of resources needed, and the manner in which the state must employ them to succeed. American presidents have pursued national interests in varying degrees of coherence and success. The current and future strategic landscape requires strong leadership, ingenuity and an assessment of vital interests to secure America's superpower status in the not so distant future. This paper will analyze the concept of national interests, how interests are derived, and the challenges posed by various government theories and ideologies in the pursuit of national interests.



## AMERICA'S PURSUIT OF THE NATIONAL INTERESTS: PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

After long and intense debate, we have set a responsible course of action by....affirming the basic wisdom of those who came before us-the Forrestals, Bradleys, Radfords, and Eisenhowers-advancing their legacy in the light of our own experience.

—President Ronald Reagan<sup>1</sup>

By signing the Goldwater Nichols Defense Authorization Act of 1986, President Ronald Regan initiated the most significant defense reorganization since the National Security Act of 1947. The President hoped to correct what was perceived as a parochial defense structure that, in reality, encouraged the promotion of individual service interests over the national interest. The establishment of civilian control over the military and the centralization of American military operational authority under the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff were the hallmarks of this reorganization. Though grand in scope, these changes fell far short of the recommendations of the 1979 “Report on the Defense Agency Review”<sup>2</sup> led by Major General Theodore Antonelli (USA, Retired). Antonelli’s report, which recommended far reaching changes in operations, structure, and oversight of defense agencies, was basically ignored.

However, the Goldwater-Nichols Act did institute a number of changes. Most importantly, the new legislation required the President to articulate the worldwide interests, objectives, and goals vital to American national security in an annual National Security Strategy Report. The rendering of the National Security Strategy Report would inform the Congress and Department of Defense of the executive branch’s vision for foreign policy, worldwide commitments, and national defense capability as well as proposed short-term and long-term use of political, economic, military, and other



elements of national power.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, the report would assess the United States' ability to sufficiently attain the stated goals and objectives required to carry out the national security strategy using all the elements of national power.

The most fundamental task in devising a grand strategy is to determine one's national interests. Once identified, interests serve as the foundation for foreign policy and military strategy; they determine the basic direction.....the types and amounts of resources needed, and the manner in which the state must employ them to succeed. Because of the critical role that national interests play, they must be carefully justified, not merely assumed.<sup>4</sup>

As detailed in Goldwater–Nichols, national interests sit at the pinnacle of America's national security strategy. According to Colonel Dan Henk, former Director of African Studies at the U.S. Army War College, theoretical treatments of the subject often assume that national interests can be identified with precision, and that there is broad agreement on their content. Further, this assumption leads to the belief that national interests are evident to national policymakers, who have access to a full range of instruments of national power and can pursue those interests without constraint. According to this view, policymakers follow a rational process to craft national security strategies using the appropriate elements of national power.<sup>5</sup> In reality this is not the case. This paper will analyze the concept of national interests, how they are derived, and the challenges posed by various government theories and ideologies in the pursuit of national interests.

## Interests Defined

Interests (material and ideal), not ideas, dominate directly the actions of men. Yet the "images of the world" created by these ideas have very often served as switches determining the tracks on which the dynamism of interests kept actions moving.<sup>6</sup>

In general, the national interests represent concerns or desirable goals of the nation as a whole. This view is self evident when the nation as a sovereign entity transcends individual, political or special interests, regardless of their focus. Ideally, the goals and ambitions of a nation are to ensure the greatest good for its citizens. To the realist, a broad definition of the pursuit of American national interests might be the maintenance, at least cost, of American values or the American way of life.<sup>7</sup> In a very practical sense, interest is defined as a participation in, or concern for, a cause, advantage, or responsibility.<sup>8</sup> This view provides a departure point from which to begin to look deeper into the concept of national interests.

## The Concept of National Interests

Joel Netshitenzhe, Head of the Policy Unit in The Presidency for South Africa, has offered a far reaching and comprehensive analysis of national interests. In his theories on "Should media serve the national interest or the public interest?" He asserted that:

National interest as a concept is meant to define the aggregate of things that guarantee the survival and flourishing of a nation-state and nation. Usually national interest is counter-posed to that of other states, as a basis for foreign policy.

Critical though is that it is not meant to be subsumed under the fleeting passions of public mood swings. For it is not impossible for the public mood at some moments to declare (as Dante once said): "Death to our life and life to our death", thus precipitating self-destruction.

Further, national interest cannot be decreed in statutes; it's a sixth sense and it evolves with a nation's history, with national experience; and it's often asserted by the ultimate formal authority, the state.<sup>9</sup>

And Netshitenzhe continues:

Public interest, on the other hand, is meant to represent the interests of the aggregate collective of citizens - independent of state institutions. It's a kind of collective civil interest, the sixth sense of civil society. Some even see it as necessarily opposed to the state, invoked to assert rights against state authority.<sup>10</sup>

Metaphorically, when viewed as a sixth sense, interests take on human attributes associated with our five senses: sight, touch, smell, taste, and hearing, adding intuition as the sixth sense. In psychology, the sixth sense is considered as sort of a hunch or intuition that foretells the future. However, this paper argues that the sixth sense of a nation greatly transcends intuition. In this respect, Aristotle's idea that we identify with what we routinely do most conforms to the transcendence of intuition. Therefore, any distinction in growth or ability is not based on arbitrary acts, but discipline brought about by habit.

Habits are a composite of "knowledge (what to do and why), skill (how to do) and desire (want to do)"<sup>11</sup> upon which other disciplines are established, imbued and sustained. Knowledge is not inbred or instinctive, but based on natural ability and developed deliberately over time via practice. Obtaining an understanding of principals and priorities is far better than obtaining silver and gold. The metaphoric sixth sense implies learning, adapting, and growing for the good of the sovereign nation. Essentially, the sixth sense is our conscience, the ethics that control our behavior.

Circumspectly, personal values, morals, and experiences which comprise this sixth sense will potentially cause a divergence between national and public interests. The division between the two does not necessarily signal a paradox, but raises the fundamental question of genuineness of the democratic state. In fact, this raises the fundamental questions of legitimacy and democracy. In a consistently democratic

dispensation, the state exists not for its own sake but to serve society. Legitimate states derive their mandate from the people, and they have the right and the responsibility to exercise leadership. Similarly, the governed have a right to contribute on how they should be governed.<sup>12</sup>

### The Theories of Political Realism and Liberalism

I dread our own power and our own ambition; I dread our being too much dreaded....We may say that we shall not abuse this astonishing and hitherto unheard-of-power. But every other nation will think we shall abuse it. It is impossible but that, sooner or later, this state of things must produce a combination against us which may end in our ruin. Edmund Burke describing his fears for the former British Empire.<sup>13</sup>

Past political theorists prescribe credence to two major ideas that have shaped how America has achieved its ambitions. They are Political Realism and Liberalism.

#### Political Realism

The concept of political realism in national interests yields that; the core ambition of the nation-state is power (military and economic) and security, which saves a nation from moral excess and political folly.<sup>14</sup> With political realism, there is no moral high ground. In the process of using power, however, the values sacrificed (e.g., education, healthcare) within the society to achieve external goals, may turn out to be more important than those gained in the pursuit of foreign policy.<sup>15</sup> Political realism is rational, calculating, and deeply rooted in human nature.

Political realism holds to the principle that “might is right.” The theory has a long history, being evident as early as Thucydides and the Peloponnesian War. Political realism assumes that interests are to be maintained through the exercise of power, and that the world is characterized by competing power bases.<sup>16</sup> Thucydides’ statement,

born of the experience of ancient Greece, that “identity of interests is the surest of bonds whether between states or individuals”<sup>17</sup> was adopted by Lord Salisbury in his nineteenth century remark that, “the only bond of union that endures” among nations is “the absence of all clashing interests.”<sup>18</sup> President George Washington embraced Lord Salisbury’s remarks as a guiding standard for America’s fledgling republican government. Washington maintained that all men, comparatively, are influenced by the governing principle of interests. He further explained that while virtue may cause men to act in disinterest, it alone is not sufficient enough to produce lasting altruism. And he stated:

Few men are capable of making a sacrifice of all views of private interests, or advantage, to the common good. It is vain to exclaim against the depravity of human nature on this account;....the experience of every age and nation has proved it and we must in great measure, change that constitution of man, before we can make it otherwise. No institution, not built on the presumptive truth of these maxims can succeed.<sup>19</sup>

## Political Liberalism

In contrast, the theory of political liberalism is concerned with the functions of government and particularly with the limitation of its powers.<sup>20</sup> While there exist some variety in the contemporary model of liberalism theory, liberalism elevates the value of human life, the promotion of human welfare and the development of individual ethics above the power of the state. Liberalism did not take root as a political theory or doctrine, but a general mental attitude. It called for an end to prejudice and all beliefs which could not be rationally justified, and for an escape from the authority of “priests and kings”<sup>21</sup> as derived from the French Revolution. From the same, the American colonial ideals of liberty and self-determination were derived. In sum, liberalism deals with the individuals’ freedom from arbitrary authority, the liberty to own and produce

wealth, and to conduct themselves in private...as is consistent with the avoidance of harm to others.<sup>22</sup>

Hans J. Morgenthau believed history opened a window from which to view the steps of statesmen past and present. It is history that captures their thoughts and actions, while anticipating their strides in the future. Both political realism and idealism have played a historic role in shaping American interests or ambitions. At times, they even appear to have been amalgamated. In a speech before the British Parliament in June 1982, President Reagan proclaimed that governments founded on a respect for individual liberty exercise “restraint” and “peaceful intentions” in their foreign policy. But he then announced a “crusade for freedom” and a campaign for democratic development.<sup>23</sup> He further opined that the ideals of international cooperation, the third historical breakthrough, is realized when democracy flourishes with the first two breakthroughs; individual enterprise and international trade. He went on to say, our military strength is a prerequisite to peace....for the ultimate determinant in the struggle that's now going on in the world (the cold war with the Soviet Union) will not be bombs and rockets, but a test of wills and ideas, a trial of spiritual resolve, the values we hold, the beliefs we cherish, the ideals to which we are dedicated.<sup>24</sup>

Essentially, President Reagan declared that democratization for the purposes of globalization, while securing the freedom of expression for some citizens of the world, were America's vital interests. While the vision of a peaceful, prosperous, and democratic world appears altruistic, and at the heart of the liberalism debate, military power, economic power and influence associated with realism can be heard throughout President Reagan's comments. In this case, the President converged polar opposite

concepts. The next two U.S. presidents (Bush and Clinton) adopted this approach to national interests in developing their grand strategies as well.

### Realism and Liberalism Concept Variants

Most political theorists agree that the application of these concepts by statesmen vary. For the purposes of this paper, Subnational and Supranational approaches are considered as variants to realism and liberalism respectively. Subnational Interests are defined as the methods of interest groups or individuals (Power Elites) who exercise control of a nation's power. According to C. Wright Mills, national interests are only a "façade for the interests of the ruling or dominant groups."<sup>25</sup> Mills identified this group as the self-perpetuating upper class, which manipulates the masses while the middle levels of power (congress and interest groups) are mired in political deadlock. Supranational interests are deemed as those methods that yield sovereign state power to international regimes, councils, treaties, and agreements. The supranational interests approach is not considered as a method that furthers the ambitions of the state. To its critics, who are mostly realists, the supranational interest approach sacrifices national interests to idealism (humanitarianism, internationalism, and a classless world society).<sup>26</sup> The supranational approach desires to eliminate what some call the barriers of life; wealth, station, and class.

Considering the theories of realism and liberalism in light of Morgenthau's views, that history provides a window from which to observe the actions of statesmen past, present, and future, we are able to determine tendencies or ambitions of power wielding elites. The figure below, adapted from Mills, is a way of determining what our national interests were, or will be. The appropriate balance among common interests may be

found when a common vision exists in the power and ideals shared between the legitimate government and the governed (horizontal axis), while keeping the power elites and the idealists in check (vertical axis). However, it is likely that attributes of one approach may be found in another.

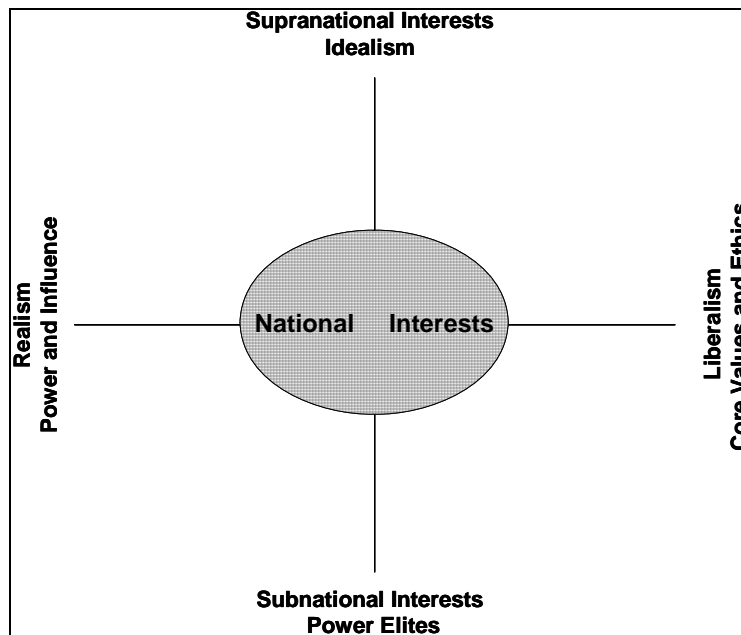


Figure 1: Approaches to the Concept of National Interests<sup>27</sup> (Liberalism/Realism Balance)

### National Interests and the Grand Strategy

Unfortunately, no American authoritative document provides an explicit definition of “national interests” in clear and certain terms. When used in strategic guidance documents, the term “national interests” bares an extreme sense of vagueness and ambiguity. Most Americans have no vivid, shared sense of this nation’s interests,<sup>28</sup> concluded the Commission on America’s National Interests, in a bi-partisan study in July of 2000. The fact that no authoritative document defines or codifies national interests could be one reason why there is no shared view of interests among American citizens. The fact that a high level of self-gratification, or realism, exists among



Americans may be a contributing factor as well. Some scholars hold that national interests cannot be decreed. The fact that no authoritative document defines interests and leaves it's determination to the whims of political elites lends some credence to this notion.

Based on our now common points from which to reference national interests, we will trace the steps of statesmen past to determine if Morgenthau's theory holds true. The sections that follow provide a concise view of interests, as stated or perceived, in previous national security councils, directives, and reports that have produced grand strategy.

#### National Security Council-68

NSC-68, the United States Objectives and Programs for National Security in 1950 stated, the fundamental purpose of the United States is to assure the integrity and vitality of our free society, which is founded upon the dignity and worth of the individual.<sup>29</sup>

Three realities emerge as a consequence of this purpose: Our determination to maintain the essential elements of individual freedom, as set forth in the Constitution and Bill of Rights; our determination to create conditions under which our free and democratic system can live and prosper; and our determination to fight if necessary to defend our way of life...."with a firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes, and our sacred Honor."<sup>30</sup>

This fact imposes on us, in our own interests, the responsibility of world leadership. It demands that we make the attempt, and accept the risks inherent in it, to bring about order and justice by means consistent with the principles of freedom and democracy. We should limit our requirement of the Soviet Union to its participation with other nations on the basis of equality and respect for the rights of others.<sup>31</sup>

While no legislation requiring a statement of national interests existed in 1950, the term “our own interests and their own interests” occurred once each in NSC-68. The use of the term “our own interest” in this context clearly implies a sense of urgency on the part of its crafters, urgency associated with action needed to ensure the survival and sovereignty of the nation. NSC-68 statements appear consistent with the definition of national interests as established in this paper as the representation of concerns or desirable goals and ambitions of the nation as a whole. If we apply Mills’ model, the ideas of NSC-68 project heavily into the Liberalism / Idealism quad. NSC-68 suggests liberalism in the willingness to part with or share personal wealth and even lay down ones life to achieve its objectives. Additionally, idealism emanates in the idea of world leadership and the creation of a functional political and economic systems in the free world. In contrast, NSC-68 objective number one suggests a realism approach (see table).

1. Make ourselves strong, both in the way in which we affirm our values in the conduct of our national life, and in the development of our military and economic strength
2. Lead in building a successfully functioning political and economic system in the free world. It is only by practical affirmation, abroad as well as at home, of our essential values, that we can preserve our own integrity, in which lies the real frustration of the Kremlin design
3. Foster a fundamental change in the nature of the Soviet system. Deter military attack by the USSR....and defeat such attacks if deterrence fails

Table 1: Objectives, National Security Council-68<sup>32</sup>

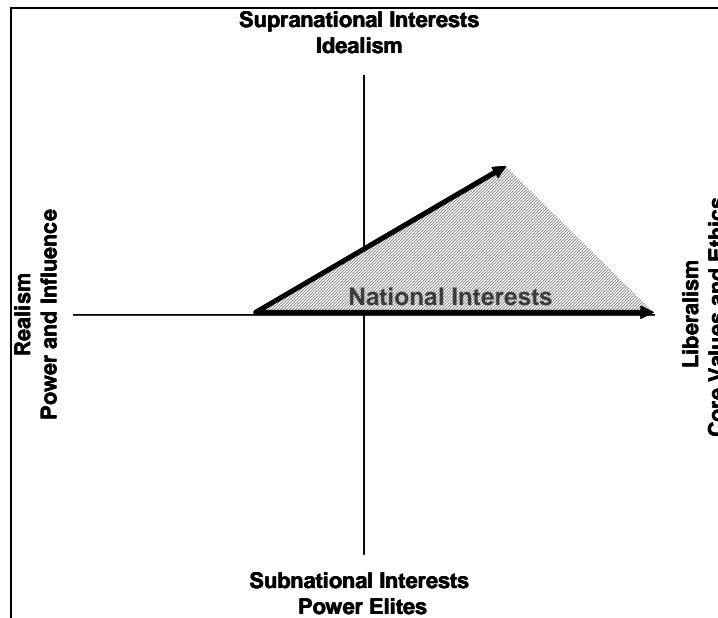


Figure 2: Approaches to the Concept of National Interests<sup>33</sup> (Liberalism/Idealism Weighted)

#### National Security Decision Directive-32

In 1982, NSDD-32 called for the development and integration of a set of diplomatic, informational, economic, and military strategies. The global objectives of this globally and regionally focused strategy were:

1. To deter military attack by the USSR....and defeat such attacks if deterrence fails
2. To strengthen U.S. influence and alliances throughout the world, by improving relations and by forming and supporting coalitions with nations friendly to U.S. interests
3. To contain and reduce the presence of Soviet control and military presence throughout the world; increase cost of Soviet use and support of terrorist and subversive forces.
4. To neutralize USSR to decrease its influence through diplomacy, arms transfers, economic pressure, propaganda and disinformation
5. To constrain soviet military spending, discourage Soviet adventurism....weaken Soviet alliance system....encourage liberalism and nationalism in Soviet and allied countries
6. To limit Soviet military by strengthening U.S. military through equitable and verifiable arms control agreements and by preventing the flow of significant military technologies and resources to the Soviet Union
7. To ensure U.S. access to foreign markets; ensure U.S., its allies, and friends access to foreign energy and mineral resources

8. To ensure U.S. access to space and oceans
9. To discourage further proliferation of nuclear weapons
10. To encourage and support aid, trade and investment programs that support economic growth of humane social and political orders in the third world
11. To promote a well functioning international economic system

Table 2: Global Objectives, National Security Decision Directive-32<sup>34</sup>

In light of these eleven objectives, the crafters of National Security Decision Directive-32 were concerned with containing and weakening Soviet hegemony. Six of the eleven objectives emphasize economic engagement. The idea of strengthening the U.S. position by using influence, alliances and the elements of national power, places this strategy into the realism approach.

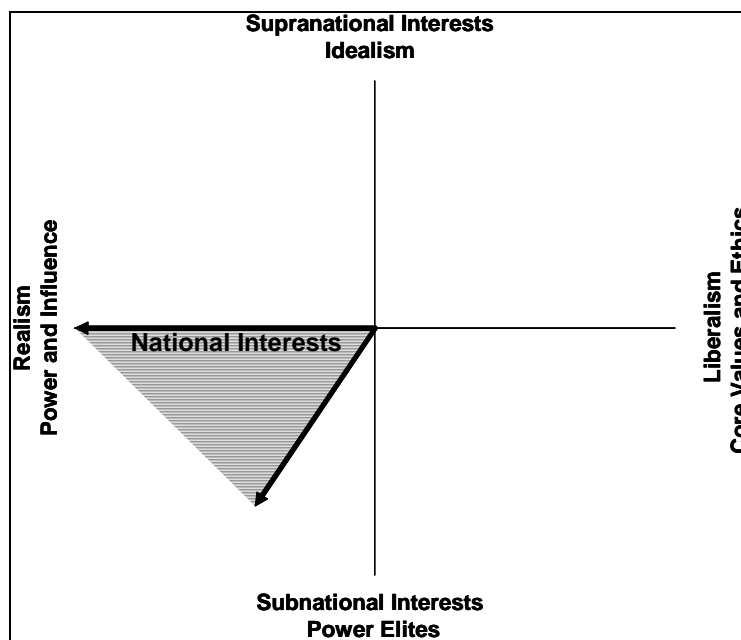


Figure: 3 Approaches to the Concept of National Interests<sup>35</sup> (Realism/Subnational Interest Weighted)

National Security Strategy, 1998

In 1998, the Clinton administration's grand strategy was entitled "A National Security Strategy for A New Century." This strategy emphasized that the fundamental

requirements of the nation were to ensure the survival, well being and prosperity of its people at home and abroad. Another key attribute of this strategy was the idea that America must maintain its sovereignty, political freedom, and independence.<sup>36</sup>

President Clinton made these comments while, acknowledging that Americans would suffer if foreign markets were closed to them. For this reason, Americans have a direct interest in the stability and human dignity of nations that make up the “open market.”

The idea of maintaining national sovereignty and foreign market dependence is actually oxymoronic. Recent global economic studies have proven that only a small fraction of Americans participate in the global market. While these overtures are seemingly altruistic, the concept of “realism,” specifically subnational interests returns to the fore.

President Clinton was the first to identify national interests in terms of intensity. Recognizing the demand on U.S. resources, Clinton believed that stating interests in terms of intensity would ensure clarity. The three categories of interests were identified as vital, important and humanitarian.

Vital interests are those directly connected to the survival, safety, and vitality of our nation. Among these are the physical security of our territory and that of our allies, the safety of our citizens, our economic well-being and the protection of our critical infrastructure. We will do what we must to defend these interests, including—when necessary—using our military might unilaterally and decisively.

Important interests do not affect our national survival, but they do affect our national well-being and the character of the world in which we live. In such cases, we will use our resources to advance these interests insofar as the costs and risks are commensurate with the interests at stake. Our efforts to halt the flow of refugees from Haiti and restore democracy in that state, our participation in NATO operations in Bosnia and our efforts to protect the global environment are relevant examples.

Humanitarian interests include natural and manmade disasters; gross violations of human rights; support to democratization; adherence to civilian control of the military and humanitarian demining. In some circumstances our nation may act because our values demand it.<sup>37</sup>

President Clinton's approach was broad and hierarchical. While Goldwater-Nichols did not require the executive branch to prioritize these interests, prioritization is implicit in the strategy formulation process. The determination of intensity is a critical step for coherent focus of interests in terms of ends, ways, and means and to foster debate among the government and the people.

Today, the military's involvement in this discourse is exemplified when the Chairman of The Joint Chiefs of Staff performs his Title 10 function as principal military advisor to the President, the National Security Council, the Homeland Security Council, and the Secretary of Defense.<sup>38</sup> The Chairman's input yields three major products that contribute to national security: the Chairman's Program Assessment (CPA), Chairman's Program Recommendation (CPR), and the Chairman's assessment on the nature and magnitude of military and strategic risks associated with executing the strategy. In doing so, the Chairman ensures the promotion of the national interest over individual service interests.

#### National Security Strategy Report of 2006

In the National Security Strategy Report of 2006, the crafters utilized a variation of the term national interests in twenty-one instances. This is significant for a term that our nation has yet to define or codify. Though the term is used extensively, the 2006 report did not articulate America's worldwide interests as such, instead a list of nine essential tasks were offered where previous administrations outlined the national interests. The nine essential tasks were:

1. Champion aspirations for human dignity
2. Strengthen alliances to defeat global terrorism and work to prevent attacks against us and our friends
3. Work with others to defuse regional conflicts
4. Prevent our enemies from threatening us, our allies, and our friends with weapons of mass destruction (WMD)
5. Ignite a new era of global economic growth through free markets and free trade
6. Expand the circle of development by opening societies and building the infrastructure of democracy
7. Develop agendas for cooperative action with other main centers of global power
8. Transform America's national security institutions to meet the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century
9. Engage the opportunities and confront the challenges of globalization

Table 3: Essential Tasks - National Security Strategy Report of 2006 <sup>39</sup>

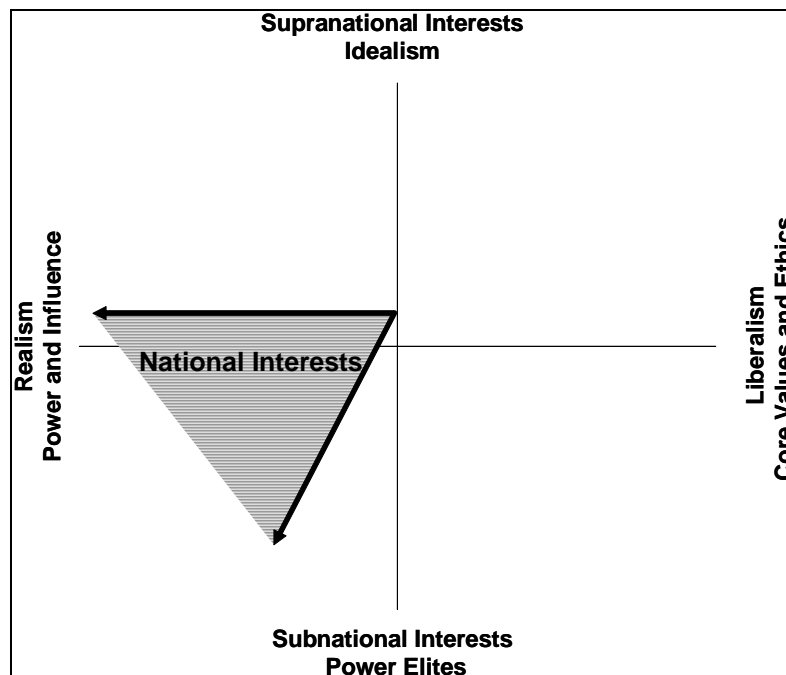


Figure 4: Approaches to the Concept of National Interests<sup>40</sup> (Realism/Subnational Interest Weighted)

The nine essential tasks from the 2006 report tend to follow the methods of the realist. While not stated as such, it is likely that the crafters of the 2006 National Security Strategy Report equate this list of essential tasks to national interests. In many ways, this list is similar to the eleven objectives of National Security Directive Document–32. Additionally, it is noteworthy that the majority of the list is foreign or externally focused. In his essay, *Crafting National Interests for the 21st Century*, Dr. Alan G. Stolberg asserts that because ...of the closing gap between the influence of external and internal issues in the 21st century international system brought about by the associated components of a rapidly globalized world, there will be no distinction made between external and internal interests. In effect, they all fall under the concept of the national interest.<sup>41</sup> Dr. Stolberg's assertion is that globalization has caused America's foreign and domestic interests to assimilate. If America's foreign and domestic interests are one, then America's national sovereignty might very well be at risk.

#### National Interest in Defense Policy and Strategy Formulation

Most contemporary scholars agree that interests are the root of foreign policy. The fact that so many of our interests are externally focused, begs the question, how do national interests serve as the basis of U.S. foreign policy goals and objectives?

Morgenthau believed that those foreign policy objectives must be defined in terms of national interests and supported with adequate power to enable national security. He further defined national security as integrity of national territory and institutions. The significant external focus of our national security strategies suggests there is no difference between national interests and foreign policy.



According to COL Jeffrey A. Springman, The current Joint Staff J-5, Chief of Strategy Development Division, U.S. interests should be the foundation for foreign and defense strategy and policy.<sup>42</sup> Clearly defined national interests assist national security and foreign policy professionals to set priorities, provide a shared framework that informs decision makers at all levels, and serve as a common “thread of intent” linking strategy and policy formulation to execution. The excerpt below defines the parameters or “Bottom Line” in which national interests have been described in the past eight years:

<p>There are several frameworks describing U.S. national interests, but they are not currently “authoritative.”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– 2000 Commission on America’s National Interests</li> <li>– 1998 National Security Strategy (President Bill Clinton).</li> <li>– 2001 Quadrennial Defense Review (SECDEF Rumsfeld)</li> </ul> <p>CJCS Guidance for 2007 – 2008 described three priorities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Develop a strategy to defend our national interests in the Middle East</li> <li>– Reset, reconstitute and revitalize our Armed Forces</li> <li>– Properly balance global strategic risk</li> </ul> <p>CJCS Guidance also describes vital national interests</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– A homeland secure from attack</li> <li>– Sustained global influence, leadership and freedom of action</li> <li>– Sustained strategic endurance and military superiority</li> <li>– Flourishing global and national economies</li> <li>– Assured access to strategic resources</li> <li>– Regional stability in the Middle East</li> </ul> <p>NSS states the U.S. will balance interests that are vital to the security and well being of the American people.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Does not specifically define vital or other interests</li> <li>– Describes nine essential tasks the US must focus on</li> </ul> <p>SECDEF discussed “competing impulses in U.S. foreign policy: realism versus idealism, freedom versus security, values versus interests.” (Williamsburg, 17 Sep 07)</p>
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Table 4: Bottom Line: U.S. National Interests<sup>43</sup>

The bipartisan Commission on America's National Interests concluded that strategy and policy must be grounded in national interests. The national interest has many strands – political, economic, security, and humanitarian. National interests are nevertheless the most durable basis for assuring policy consistency. Garnering popular support for U.S. foreign and domestic policy is best achieved, when American values are consistent with the national interests. The problem is the perception that strategy formulation is a rational and systemic process. In fact, strategy formulation both within the executive branch and between the executive branch and Congress is an intensely political process from which national strategy emerges after protracted bargaining and compromise. Key personalities do what they can agree to do,<sup>44</sup> according to Earl H. Tilford, former Director of Research at the U.S. Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute.

#### How Are Interests Derived?

We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.<sup>45</sup>

Human beings possess an intrinsic survival instinct. At birth most human babies cry. They instinctively suck when something is placed in their mouths, no matter what it is. The baby's cry signals to its mothers a need, whether it is for food or comfort. Its suck reflex enables him or her to receive the nourishment necessary for survival. Without these instincts the child would conceivably perish. In like manner, our highest national interest is to survive. The preamble to the constitution, though it has no statutory significance, proclaims that America exists to provide its citizens and those

who follow with justice, national and family harmony, shared protection, happiness and the good fortune of freedom.

In the Declaration of Independence, the Second Continental Congress conferred and adopted a set of inalienable rights, endowed by their Creator.....that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness.<sup>46</sup> The aforementioned creed, responded to the framers' perception that the philosophy of the British government impaired their God granted rights. If the inalienable rights are impaired, the pursuant goals and ambitions inherent therein are as well. In other words, the British government, at that time, did not serve the interests of the American colonial citizenry. The lesson learned by the British from their imperialistic tendencies and the Germans from their universal nationalistic tendencies support this truth...that states should try to respect the interests of other states.<sup>47</sup>

The Constitution is the foundation by which we are united and share a common vision. However, it is only as effective as "we the people" allow. After all, constitutionality is challenged daily and some choose to interpret it in accordance with their given individual, special, or political interests.

### Final Analysis

Whether conceived in aspirations of religious freedom as Pilgrims, in quests for wealth and adventure as paid servants, or in the righteous cause of liberty from tyrannical oppression as Revolutionaries, our forefathers acted to establish and preserve their interests. Their courage and ambitions witnessed the birth and maturation of our republic. Blood, sweat, and tears were the ransoms paid for the sake of liberty, and to preserve the fledgling union. America's resilience was witnessed through

conditions of isolation and depression. Unfortunately, our country witnessed, a dark past, where America has not always lived up to the meaning of its creed.

For instance, early Americans desired a better way of life, free from the arbitrary rule of tyrants. These desires were in many ways realized by enslaving and oppressing Africans. They justified these enslavements by declaring, in the Article 1, Section two of the Constitution, that those enslaved were not fully men, but three fifths of persons. This institution called slavery witnesses America's rapid ascent from a colonial to global power (economically and militarily). While this was perpetrated, the Declaration of Independence, held that all men were created equal and endowed, by their Creator, with certain inalienable rights; the right to Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness. Even the earliest of Americans were a mix of realists and power elites (politicians/military men, land and slave owners) and liberalists (abolitionists, Quakers). Theories and approaches to national interests were inherent in America's beginnings.

A 2007 Center for Strategic and International Studies Commission report entitled, *A Smarter, More Secure America*, revealed that the world is looking to an America whose actions are consistent with its stated values. We have all seen the poll numbers and know that much of the world today is not happy with American leadership. Even traditional allies have questioned American values and interests, wondering whether they are compatible with their own. We do not have to be loved, but we will never be able to accomplish our goals and keep Americans safe without mutual respect.<sup>48</sup> The words of "father statesman" President George Washington support this ideal. In his farewell address to the American people, he warned of the inborn dangers of

subnational interests, and entanglements of our own interests with those of foreign governments. And he said:

Observe good faith and justice toward all nations. Cultivate peace and harmony with all. It will be worthy of a free, enlightened, and at no distant period a great nation to give to mankind the magnanimous and too novel example of a people always guided by an exalted justice and benevolence.

In the execution of such a plan nothing is more essential than that permanent, inveterate antipathies against particular nations and passionate attachments for others should be excluded, and that in place of them just and amicable feelings toward all should be cultivated. The nation which indulges toward another a habitual hatred or a habitual fondness is in some degree a slave. It is a slave to its animosity or to its affection, either of which is sufficient to lead it astray from its duty and its interest.

So, likewise, a passionate attachment of one nation for another produces a variety of evils. Sympathy for the favorite nation, facilitating the illusion of an imaginary common interest in cases where no real common interest exists, and infusing into one the enmities of the other, betrays the former into a participation in the quarrels and wars of the latter without adequate inducement or justification. It leads also to ... ill will, and a disposition to retaliate in the parties from whom equal privileges are withheld; and it gives to ambitious, corrupted, or deluded citizens facility to betray or sacrifice the interests of their own country without ... the appearances of a virtuous sense of obligation, a commendable deference for public opinion, or a laudable zeal for public good...

Against the insidious wiles of foreign influence the jealousy of a free people ought to be constantly awake, since history and experience prove that foreign influence is one of the most baneful foes of republican government. But that jealousy, to be useful, must be impartial, else it becomes the instrument of the very influence to be avoided, instead of a defense against it. Real patriots who may resist the intrigues of the favorite are liable to become suspected and odious, while its tools and dupes usurp the applause and confidence of the people to surrender their interests.<sup>49</sup>

What Washington described as foreign entanglements is embraced today as “interdependence” or world leadership. These warnings seem to have gone unheard, forgotten, or perhaps disregarded.

Invariably, our interests and approaches to them identify who we are. America's sixth sense or conscience will enable her to, not only acknowledge the lessons from the past, but apply them to the future. Therefore, we must constantly glean from our past to understand the present, and to prepare for the future. We then learn, from past statesmen, that all things expedient are not necessarily profitable in the long run.

### What Are America's National Interests?

We previously discussed the external focus of U.S. national interests and essential tasks as stated in past and current national security documents. If we consider the definition of national interests as the concerns or desirable goals of the nation as a whole, the focus of our interests would be inherently internal and not external. Then, the appropriate foreign policy goals and objectives would naturally flow from those interests. The assertion here is that our national interests should not be inherently foreign, but should serve as the basis of foreign policy.

At the crux of this discussion of national interests are three fundamental ideas aimed at the common good of all Americans. Consistent with the Preamble, they are 1) justice, 2) harmony and equal protection, and 3) blessings guaranteed by the democratic process in a free America. Through these common bonds, we ensure the integrity and vitality of America, our fundamental purpose.

### Conclusion

American pursuit of national interests has varied in scope, degree of coherence, and realization. From its inception, America has maximized its power and alliances to ensure its survival, security and prosperity, as political realists, while balancing altruistic virtues associated with liberalism when beneficial. This analysis finds that America's

approach to national interests fall clearly into the Theory of Political Realism defined in terms of power and security.

The concept of national interests and the approach to attaining them is very complex. Posterity may forever debate the crux, intents, and ambitions that fuel our actions. For 232 years of existence, as a Westphalia<sup>50</sup> patterned nation, scholars have debated the attributes of America's interests, yet they remain vaguely defined. The term "national interests" have been written on the pages of national security documents in what appears to be an unjustifiable manner. In spite of years of debate among academia, the U.S. has made minimal gains in defining the term "national interests" or in establishing ordinal priority of national interests as the Clinton Administration attempted. America requires a thoughtful bipartisan approach to formally define national interests.

America's national ambitions, not those of "political or power elites" should be at the heart of public discourse and chief among congressional debate. One challenge we face is the dissonance inherent in partisan politics, void of a shared vision. The need for a unifying vision seemed to resonate with President Abraham Lincoln as he decreed in his Gettysburg address, "that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom—and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth."<sup>51</sup> As the Scriptures warn, without a vision the people perish.<sup>52</sup>

## Endnotes

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<sup>2</sup> U.S. Congress, Committee On Armed Services House Of Representatives, *Background Information on Structural Reform of the Department of Defense*, 99<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2d sess., March 1986, 17 ;available from <http://www.ndu.edu/library/goldnich/9915.pdf>; Internet; accessed 2 March 2008.

<sup>3</sup> *Goldwater-Nichols Department Of Defense Reorganization Act*, Public Law 99-433, 1 October 1986.

<sup>4</sup> Robert J. Art, *A Grand Strategy for America* (London, UK: Cornell University Press, 2003), 45.

<sup>5</sup> Dan Henk, "US National Interests in Sub-Saharan Africa," *Parameters* (Winter 1997-1998): 92-107

<sup>6</sup> Marianne Weber, *Max Weber* (Tuebinge, GE: J.C.B. Mohr, 1962), 347-348; quoted in Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1973), 9.

<sup>7</sup> Eugene J. Rosi, *American Defense and Détente* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1973), 12

<sup>8</sup> "Interests," linked from *Dictionary.com Unabridged (v 1.1) Home Page*, available from [http://dictionary.reference.com/ browse/interests](http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/interests); Internet; accessed 20 March 2008.

<sup>9</sup> Joel Netshitenzhe, Government Communications and Information Systems, "Should Media Serve the National Interest or the Public Interest?", 19 October 2002, available from [http://www.gcis.gov.za/ media/ceo/021019.htm](http://www.gcis.gov.za/media/ceo/021019.htm); Internet; accessed 16 February 2008.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Stephen R. Covey, *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* (New York: Simon & Schuster 1989), 47.

<sup>12</sup> Netshitenzhe.

<sup>13</sup> Edmund Burke, "Global Issues: Foreign Policy—National Interests," available from <http://www.globalissues.org/Geopolitics/ForeignPolicy.asp>; Internet; accessed 16 February 2008.

<sup>14</sup> Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, 5th ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1973), 11.

<sup>15</sup> Rosi, 12.

<sup>16</sup> Alexander Mosley, "Political Realism," linked from *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy Home Page*, available from <http://www.iep.utm.edu/p/polreal.htm>; Internet; accessed 2 March 2008.

<sup>17</sup> Morgenthau, 8.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 9.



<sup>19</sup> George Washington, *The Writings of George Washington*, Vol. 10, ed. John C. Fitzpatrick (Washington, D.C.: United States Printing Office, 1931-1944), 353; quoted in Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, 5th ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1973), 9.

<sup>20</sup> Friedrich A. Hayek, *New Studies in Philosophy, Politics, Economics and the History of Ideas* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 142.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 120.

<sup>22</sup> David Miller, et al., eds., "liberalism," in *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Political Thought* (Oxford, NY: B. Blackwell, 1987); available from <http://www.politicsprofessor.com/politicaltheories/liberalism.php>; Internet; accessed 10 March 2008

<sup>23</sup> Ronald Reagan, "Address to British Parliament," 8 June 1982, available from <http://www.historyplace.com/speeches/reagan-parliament.htm>; Internet; accessed 20 March 2008.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Rosi, 13.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Adapted by the author from Eugene J. Rosi, "Four Ways of Approaching the Concept of National Interests figure," in *American Defense and Détente* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1973), 13.

<sup>28</sup> Commission on America's National Interests, *America's National Interests* (Cambridge, MA: Commission on America's National Interests, July 2000), 13.

<sup>29</sup> National Security Council, *United States Objectives and Programs for National Security*, NSC 68 (Washington, D.C.: National Security Council, 14 April 1950), 3.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 7.

<sup>33</sup> Adapted by the author from Rosi.

<sup>34</sup> Ronald Reagan, *The National Security Strategy*, National Security Decision Directive 32 (Washington, D.C.: The White House, 20 May 1982), 1-2.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> William Jefferson Clinton, *A National Security Strategy for a New Century* (Washington, D.C.: The White House, October 1998), 5 .

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> *Armed Forces, U.S. Code*, Title 10, Chap 5, Selections 151-153,163, and 181.

<sup>39</sup> George W. Bush, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, D.C.: The White House, 16 March 2006), 1.

<sup>40</sup> Adapted by the author from Rosi.

<sup>41</sup> Alan G. Stolberg, *Crafting National Interests in the 21st Century*, Conference Paper (San Francisco, CA: International Studies Association West Conference, 28-29 September 2007), 2. Dr. Alan G. Stolberg is a professor with the U.S. Army War College, Department of National Security Studies.

<sup>42</sup> Colonel Jeff Springman, email message to author, *National Interest 5x8 Card*, produced 1 October 2007; info was provided for Rear Admiral Davidson's use at the 16 January 2008 Senior Readiness Oversight Council .

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Earl H. Tilford, "Foreword," in Don M. Snider, *The National Security Strategy: Documenting Strategic Vision*, 2d ed. (Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S. Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, 1995), iii; Tilford's foreword was based on Colonel (USA retired) Don M. Snider's experiences as the former National Security Council Director of Defense Policy during the Reagan and Bush Administrations.

<sup>45</sup> *Constitution of the United States, Preamble*, available from [http://www.senate.gov/civics/constitution\\_item/constitution.htm](http://www.senate.gov/civics/constitution_item/constitution.htm); Internet; accessed 20 March 2008.

<sup>46</sup> Wikipedia, "Declaration of Independence," available from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United\\_States\\_Declaration\\_of\\_Independence](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Declaration_of_Independence); Internet; accessed 18 February 2008

<sup>47</sup> Robert Gilpin, *Global Political Economy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 16.

<sup>48</sup> Center for Strategic and International Studies Commission on Smart Power, *A Smarter, More Secure America* (Washington, D.C.: CSIS Press, November 2007), 7.

<sup>49</sup> George Washington, "President George Washington's Farewell Address," available from [http://www.utulsa.edu/law/classes/rice/Constitutional/Washingtons\\_Farewell\\_Address.htm](http://www.utulsa.edu/law/classes/rice/Constitutional/Washingtons_Farewell_Address.htm); Internet; accessed 22 March 2008.

<sup>50</sup> "Overview of The Westphalian Settlement," available from <http://home.earthlink.net/~tebrister/westphalia>; Internet; accessed 20 March 2008. Westphalian sovereignty is the settlement that ended the "Thirty Years War" and resulted in the unintended emergence of the European states system. It represented a "stalemate" among the powers of Europe and resulted in the advent of the institutions of anarchy and state sovereignty.

<sup>51</sup> Abraham Lincoln, "Transcript of the Gettysburg Address (1863)," available from <http://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=false&doc=36&page=transcript>; Internet; accessed 20 March 2008.

<sup>52</sup> *The Holy Bible*, King James Version, Proverbs 29:18, available from <http://www.blueletterbible.org/kjv/Pro/Pro029.html#18>; Internet; accessed 20 March 2008.